

## THIRD LANGUAGE THROUGH FIRST LANGUAGE - SHIFTING THE PARADIGM

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### ABSTRACT

*The paper addresses a key issue in language planning of the third world countries, specifically Pakistan, a country that remained under the shackles of Colonialism till 1947. But, still the country does not have a clear cut language policy. Being richly multilingual and multicultural, it had to cope with the problem of a second language, the national language and the regional and local languages. The often accepted dictum "choosing to learn a second language affords you unending possibilities" does not hold ground here. Learning a second language is a compulsion. But the second language could be Urdu, English or some powerful local language. This confusion has since long marred the teaching learning situation in some of the third world countries especially Pakistan. The teacher remains affixed with the Grammar Translation Method. The students have to refer to Urdu to learn English. However, Urdu is not the mother tongue of ninety three percent of the population. Hence, the students have to translate their thoughts twice which more often results in the loss of meaning. The present study was experimental in nature which sought to find answer to the question: Is it possible to do away with Urdu and refer to the local language of the child while teaching him the English language? The study followed a pre-test, post-test and a single group experimental design. It was found that the students were more enthusiastic in learning the English language through the medium of their local language. It is conceded that Urdu may be taught as a national language but while teaching the foreign language, its middle-man status must be done away with.*

### INTRODUCTION

More than six thousand languages are spoken in the world today (Gardan, 2005). A considerable number of these languages is on the verge of extinction. This is largely due to the political reasons as a politically powerful linguistic group monopolises the linguistic scene and renders other languages powerless. In such cases, the minor languages are disregarded as impure forms and reduced to dialects. When these languages are looked down upon, their speakers also hesitate speaking them. Thus one of the major causes of language decline is shame (Asif, 2005). Another important factor responsible for low esteem associated with a local language is the importance attached to the foreign language. Many of the countries that remained under the colonial rule have to cope with the colonial linguistic heritage (Phillipsan, 1992). These countries have a foreign language that somehow or the other remains there, in some cases French but for most of the cases, it is English. The centre, it

is argued, has exerted its political and cultural influence on the periphery through the colonial language. Teaching of colonial languages in the postcolonial world has been viewed by many scholars with suspicion. There have been suggestions that English Language Teaching (ELT) is "a means towards political and economic goals, a means of securing ties of all kinds with the Third World Countries" (Phillipsan, 1990:128).

The other side of the picture reveals a completely different story. The teaching and learning of English that was once looked down upon by the patriotic and zealous colonised has resulted in many varieties of English. What was once called English is now classified as British, American, Australian, South African, Indian, Pakistani, and Nigerian English. It has become an international language with different varieties that have arisen from the contact of local or national languages with the English language. This realisation has helped in blowing away many myths attached with ELT. However, it is a fact that English remains

the language of power throughout the post-colonised world.

Pakistan is one such country where English remains the language of power and prestige. It is learned not only because it is an international lingua franca but also because its knowledge guarantees a secure future and a powerful job in the government machinery (Rasool & Mansoor, 2007). Next in the line of power is the Urdu language, a language that very few people, less than eight percent of the population, own as their mother tongue. Because of certain historical and ideological reasons, it has got the status of the national lingua franca and is thus used for inter-provincial communication. It is not only learned as a separate subject but is also employed as a medium of instruction in an overriding majority of schools. A few elite schools adopt the English medium of instruction. Schofield and Ghani (2003) report that the upper class parents in Pakistan can pay for expensive schooling of their children in the elite institutions where the medium of instruction is English. The poor cannot afford such a luxury. This poor section has to content with the Urdu medium of instruction.

In such a scenario, the regional languages or the mother tongues of more than ninety two percent of the population are ignored. This healthy population has almost seventy languages. Major languages include Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashtu, Soraiki, Hindku, Baluchi, Pahari/Potohari and Brahvi. Out of these regional languages only Sindhi is used as medium of instruction at a level worth consideration, though Pashtu is also employed as a medium of instruction in a few schools of the North Western Frontier Province (Rahmon, 2002). The speakers of the regional languages learn Urdu as a second language because they have to cope with the Urdu medium syllabus. After learning Urdu, they have to learn English as a third language. They do so with the help of Urdu. The mother tongue vanishes somewhere in the academic domain. However, it is deeply rooted in the psyche of the child. Whenever he has to understand a concept in English, he has to translate his thoughts twice i.e. from the mother tongue to the national language and then from the national language to English.

This study sought to find answer to the question: Is it possible to do away with Urdu and refer to the local language of the child while teaching him the English language? The study followed a pre-test, post-test, and single group experimental design.

## Background

### *Languages in Education: Mother Tongue, L1, L2, L3 And Foreign Language: What More?*

The concept that, language is the most effective means of communication in the classroom has seldom been argued. The child learns through listening and speaking. For more than a half century now, language use, language learning, medium of instruction and language in education has all remained the subject of discussion in educational and linguistic research. First, second and additional language learning have always occupied the centre stage. In multilingual societies, this has been the norm. The first language of the child is his/her mother tongue, the language that he/she learns at home. The second language may be a foreign language or a national language. The additional languages may include not only the local languages to serve the mother tongue, but also the foreign language learnt for a specific purpose. The foreign language is taught as a separate subject, mostly in the later stages of academic life. This is what makes it essentially foreign. As against it "a Second language usually has official status or recognised function within a country which a foreign language has not" (Stern, 1983:16).

There are, however, cases where the term third language is also applicable. In such contexts, besides the mother tongue of the child, there is usually a national language and an official language. The second language is used for a variety of purposes: it can be a medium of instruction, the language of media, inter-provincial communication and so on. The third language is third in the line of learning. It may be a language that the child or an adult starts learning after he has got control of two languages. An instance of the third language would be English for people who have migrated to Canada from Germany and they already speak French. English is also a

third language for those children who enter the school, knowing two languages and they learn the third language at the school. Jessner (2006) presents many categories of speakers of English as a third language. He includes speakers of Heritage languages as well as children going to schools in Africa when they already have the knowledge of two languages at their disposal. Another category is of those Japanese who already know Korean but learn English as a third language. Jessner also refers to speakers of English as a third language in Hong Kong "who already speak Cantonese and Mandarin" (2006:3). However, another category would include all those who begin learning English after they have learnt their mother tongue and the national language. These children do not necessarily learn the second language at home. Majority of them are exposed to it in the school.

Until recently, it had been customary with linguists and educationists to suggest that the second language of a child could be any language that he learnt after his L1. There is now an awareness that every additional language, after the mother tongue has been learnt, keeps on making the language system more and more complex. It has also been argued that multilinguals have a language processing device that is different from that of the bilinguals. The language processing device of the multilinguals consists of "a Common Underlying Conceptual Base (CUCB) and two or more Constantly Available Interacting Systems (CAIS), none of which is the same as the language system of a monolingual" (Kecskes and Papp, 2000:53).

## Mother Tongue in the Classroom

Till the twentieth century, the most popular method of teaching the foreign languages was the use of the child's mother tongue. The beginning of the Reform Movement saw an end to the use of the mother tongue for teaching of foreign and second languages. With the adoption of the communicative approach to teaching languages, this process was completed and it was believed that mother tongue was merely a source of hindrance in the way of learning effective communication in the target language. Things have started to change in the recent times. Many of the researches in the modern day have

proved that the judicious use of the mother tongue can prove quite beneficial (Atkinson, 1987; Sheelagh & Rinvuluciri, 2002). Atkinson (1993) advocates the use of the mother tongue in the procedural stages of the class, for e.g. in setting up pair work and group work. In an earlier article Atkinson (1987) described a variety of applications of the mother tongue in the classroom. In recognition of the importance of mother tongue, Swain et al (1989:3) report: Provision of HL (Heritage Language) schooling provides the opportunity for the children to understand their surroundings and experience academic success, self-confidence, a stronger sense of personal worth and positive feelings about school.

It has also been argued that educating the children in their mother tongue not only helps the mother tongue proficiency but it also sharpens the students' proficiency in the additional languages. "There is ample research showing that students are quicker to learn to read and acquire other academic skills when first taught in their mother tongue" (UNICEF, 1999:41). If the mother tongue is employed as a medium of instruction, it helps in lowering the affective filter and the child expresses himself freely and fluently. Auerbach (1993:19) verifies this idea when she concludes her research thus: "Starting with the L1 provides a sense of security and validates the learners' lived experiences, allowing them to express themselves. The learner is then willing to experiment and take risks with English."

But, research suggests that the child's mother tongue is fragile in the earlier stages of his life and thus can be lost very quickly. Losing the mother tongue may amount to lose one's identity and culture in favour of a different identity and culture. The children, who are forced to forget about their mother tongue while at school, forget an essential part of who they really are (Cummins, 2000). This might ultimately have adverse effects on the society itself (Cummins, 2001). In a study to measure the attitudes of the students towards English, Urdu and Punjabi, Mansoor (1993) reports that the Punjabi students rate English and Urdu much higher in the academic domain as compared to Punjabi.



## The Thirdness of English: A Case for Urdu as a Second Language

Urdu is the national language of Pakistan (Article 251). However, it is not the language that a majority of Pakistanis speak. Only 7.57 percent of the population owns it as the mother tongue (Pakistan Census Report, 1998). These Pakistanis usually referred to as *mohajirs*, a diasporic community who transmigrated from India after the partition of the Indian Sub-continent. According to the Pakistan Census Report (1998), the results for the languages commonly spoken in the homes were as under:

Urdu	7.57 %
Punjabi	44.51%
Sindhi	14.1%
Pashtu	15.42%
Balochi	3.57%
Saraiki	10.53%
Others	4.66%

More than sixty minor languages can be included in the category marked "others".

In all the Government schools, the medium of instruction is Urdu. There are a few elite English medium schools which educate two to three percent of the school going children. More than Ninety percent of the children cannot afford such schooling. They get admissions to either the Government schools or some so-called English medium private schools where the medium of instruction is Urdu but English is taught as a compulsory subject from Nursery onwards. The students are taught the Urdu language in schools. For many of them, it is the first exposure to Urdu.

English was a foreign language in Pakistan. It is no more so for many reasons. Firstly, it is the language of power (Rahman, 2002, 2006). Power without a knowledge of and command over this language comes only to a political, religious or a tribal leader and a business tycoon. Unfortunately, Ninety nine percent of the population does not fulfil that criterion. A candidate for the civil superior services must exhibit good command over English. English is taught as a compulsory subject from the Primary

level. It is the language of higher education in Pakistan. Though it is being taught in schools since the country's inception, those who are fluent in it could not be more than three to four percent of the population (Rahman, 2002). Those with a working knowledge of English would certainly be more than that. Article 251 of the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (1973) states,

- The National language of Pakistan is Urdu, and arrangements shall be made for its use for official and other purposes within fifteen years from the commencing day.
- Subject to clause (1), the English language may be used for official purposes until arrangements are made for its replacement by Urdu.
- Without prejudice to the status of the National language, a Provincial Assembly may, by law prescribe measures for the teaching, promotion and use of a Provincial language in addition to the National language.

After thirty four years of the promulgation of the constitution, there are no signs of the implementation of Article 251. English remains the official language of all the government departments, in higher courts and the superior judiciary. This has led to a commonly held belief that English, instead of Urdu, is the national language of Pakistan (Rasool and Mansoor, 2007).

### English Language Teaching in Pakistani Classrooms:

Classroom teaching is very orthodox in nature in the Pakistani schools especially in the Government sector schools. The method of teaching adopted in the English language Classroom seems to be the oldest form of Grammar Translation Method when it was perhaps in its evolutionary process. The role of teacher is of prime importance as compared to the students who have usually no personal opinion of their own and such an effort on the part of the students to develop their own, opinion is strongly discouraged as it is taken to be the blatant challenge put to the teacher. Therefore, the students are very passive and are supposed to be passive and follow what is told and dictated. Another reason of the students being passive in the classroom is the 'terror' that is

attached to the personalities of the teachers. As is the case with general conservative behaviour of the whole nation, teachers also believe in the traditional system of punishment and have a tendency to create a distance between themselves and the students.

Given this general environment in the classroom, the focus of teaching is mainly on two things: a) developing reading and writing skills, and b) teaching the rules of the language. This is done by using Urdu as a medium for teaching English. This is by and large, concept of language where no listening and speaking takes place. This is how the teachers were themselves taught and therefore, they believe in the same trodden path for the purpose of teaching English.

During the classroom proceedings, the teacher translates the texts of English into Urdu and preferably into the most difficult words of Urdu whose traces can be found in the languages such as Arabic and Persian. Most of the times it happens that words used for translation are not only difficult for the students to understand but also pose a lot of difficulty to them as far as pronunciation of these words is concerned. The students are often at a loss in this mix up. On the other hand, the teachers believe that such words bring good marks for the students. Therefore, in their view, it is not important for the students to comprehend the things but to learn things by heart. Such a practice brings the morale of the students down and this activity of teaching becomes a boring thing for them and consequently, the conscious process of learning on the part of the students is badly disturbed.

Grammar of the language is also taught in Urdu. A very difficult vocabulary is developed by the teachers for this purpose again a blend of Arabic and Persian. Grammar usually includes twelve tenses of English. If a student masters these twelve tenses, he is supposed to have learned the language. Such students commit the rules of the tenses in their memories and reproduce them whenever they are asked to reproduce. Ignoring the listening and speaking component completely, the students partially develop writing capability. Having this type of writing capability means that the students have to rely on their native language and then Urdu to reach the

rules of English which is their target language. Embarking on such a deductive approach, the students have to squeeze the rules of Urdu, English and their mother tongue to write something in English.

Reading comprehension' exercise is done through collecting word list, and questions focusing on observing the tense recognition. The tense is recognized by recollecting the rules taught earlier. Such rules lay stress on the mechanical aspect of the parts of speech. The students try to infer the meaning through the apparent faces of the words, and then locating their alternative in Urdu and then in their mother tongue. In this way the energies of the students is wasted on many directions and the purpose of teaching is not achieved.

Usually, the teachers in the Pakistani context are not themselves proficient in English language. Therefore, even if they know that listening and speaking are very important, they cannot impart these two skills to the students. Moreover, they lack training which hampers their performance. Sometimes it is observed that teachers, who have the necessary expertise for teaching English, do not practically, use it. They blame the examination system which requires the traditional methods of teaching. Therefore in their opinion, they have to prepare students for examination in which their (teachers') performance is also measured.

## Purpose of the Study

The study was carried out with an aim to find out the suitability of using the mother tongue while teaching the foreign language to the multilingual children in Pakistan.

## Research Question

Is it possible to do away with Urdu and refer to the local language of the children while teaching them the English language?

## Research Methodology

The study was experimental in nature and used a pre-test, post-test and single group experimental design.

## Population and sampling

Population of the study included those English language learners in the Punjab province of Pakistan who speak

Punjabi as the mother tongue. As a sample, forty secondary class English language learners were selected from District Khushob of the Punjab Province. These students were learning the Class IX English textbook published by the Punjab Textbook Board.

## Contents of the study

Pre-test and post-test were developed in order to gauge the performance of the students before and after the training. The t-test was used to compare the means of the results of pre-test and the post-test in order to find out whether there was a difference in achievement after the training. The test comprised of 50 items and each item was allocated with 1 mark weightage.

Great care had to be taken in the selection of the course content for the study because it might have had an adverse effect on the end-term performance of the students. This was perhaps the most important ethical issue of this study. Thus the translation portion of the course was not touched at all. Instead the composition and grammar section were taught through the mother tongue of the children.

## Classroom Techniques and Process of Implementation

The first couple of days were unique in the sense that the students had never imagined what the teacher had up his sleeve. They were pleasantly surprised at having heard their mother tongue being used for academic purposes. Sometimes they were shy and at other times they were overtly enthusiastic.

Each lesson began with an introduction in the mother tongue. The students were invited to come up with their ideas about the topic. For instance, the lesson titled "The Chinese Wisdom" began with a discussion on the theme of the lesson i.e. what a ruler should know about the ruled.

First five lessons of the textbook were taught. The discussion was lively because there was a fluency of ideas and their expression. This was followed by text reading. The equivalents for the difficult words were provided in Punjabi. As far as possible, the grammatical items were also explained in the mother tongue of the children.

The Present and Past Indefinite tenses were also taught through comparison with the mother tongue. The students

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t value	P value
Over All Pre Test	31.53	38	3.797	.616	-5.405	.000
Over All Post Test	35.03	38	5.602	.909		

Table 1. T-test Whole sample

were asked to tell a story in their mother tongue. They were then asked to point out the words and phrases that made it a past event. After they had done it, the teacher told the same story in English. The difficult words and expressions were explained in the mother tongue. In the next stage, the teacher asked the students to relate the events in the story as if they happened regularly. He now explains the idea behind it. The students are given a couple of exercises for practice.

## Data Analysis

Data collected through pre-test and post-test was analysed through applying the t-test. The data was tabulated in three sets of tables.

The findings from the table 1 reveals that there is a significant difference between the test scores of the students before and after the treatment. It can be seen that the scores from the post-test are significantly better than the pre-test scores.

Table 2 shows that there is a significant improvement in the results of the low achievers after the treatment. The mean score that was 28.37 before the treatment improved more than two points after the treatment.

Table 3 compares the scores of the High Achievers and the results show that there was a significant improvement in the performance after treatment.

It was observed during the treatment that the students took greater interest in learning the English language through the medium of their mother tongue as compared to learning English through Urdu. It was found that reference to the mother tongue resulted in greater fluency and comprehension on the part of the students. Before starting the training, the researcher also carried out

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T value	P value
Low Achiever Pre Test	28.37	19	2.241	.514	-2.801	.012
Low Achiever Post Test	30.84	19	3.848	.883		

Table 2. T-test Low-Achievers



	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T value	P value
High Achiever Pre Test	34.68	19	1.887	.433	-4.978	.000
High Achiever Post Test	39.21	19	3.568	.819		

Table 3. T-test High Achievers

a survey interview with all the students. The students were asked question about the usage of the mother tongue at home, which language would they prefer to use in the classroom and how high did they rate their mother tongue. Except for a couple of students, the rate was for the mother tongue. This also reflected in the performance of the students.

## Conclusion

There is no point in denying the fact that in a multilingual society like Pakistan, we need a national lingua franca and Urdu has rightly been conferred with the title due to the historical and ideological reasons. However, emphasis on the national language should not make us oblivious of our responsibility towards the preservation of the indigenous languages. Urdu should be taught as a separate subject. Nevertheless, giving it the status of the middle man, while teaching the children a foreign language, may be one of the reasons for the poor performance of the students. There is a reasonable amount of difference between the ways we learn the national language and the foreign language. That is why it is concluded that there is no need to refer to the national language while teaching the foreign language. If the students have to refer to another language while learning English, it must be their own language, the language they are brought up with at home.

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